

# **THE DEFENSE ACQUISITION WORKFORCE IMPROVEMENT ACT: FIVE YEARS LATER**

***Andrea Garcia, Hugo Keyner, Thomas J. Robillard,  
and Mary VanMullekom***

DAWIA was enacted five years ago, and the following selective assessment finds that progress has been made. The authors review the changes made to achieve the goals outlined in the legislation, and focus on several areas that remain to be addressed, in order to carry out the intent of the law.

**T**he Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA), Public Law 101-510, Title 10 U.S.C.<sup>1</sup>, was enacted to improve the effectiveness of the personnel who manage and implement defense acquisition programs. As part of the fiscal year 1991 Defense Authorization Act, it called for establishing an Acquisition Corps and professionalizing the acquisition workforce through education, training, and work experience. While the Act applied to both civilian and military personnel, it emphasized the need to offer civilians greater opportunities for professional development and advancement.

This study examines the state of defense acquisition workforce management five years after the law was enacted. We will not provide a comprehensive review of DAWIA implementation throughout

the entire Department of Defense (DoD), but will instead focus on selected areas. We look across military departments and defense agencies to compare and contrast their policies and procedures regarding how they manage their acquisition workforce. The primary focus is on issues pertaining to civilians, since they make up the majority of the defense acquisition workforce and are a special emphasis area in DAWIA.

We found much progress has been made over the past five years, and the DoD Components<sup>2</sup> have achieved significant gains in improving the quality of their acquisition workforce. But more remains to be done. Our analysis shows that two main areas need improvement: diversity of policies and practices, and disparity between civilian and military opportuni-

<b>Report Documentation Page</b>			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
<p>Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.</p>				
1. REPORT DATE <b>1997</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-1997 to 00-00-1997</b>		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act: Five Years Later</b>			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	5b. GRANT NUMBER
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)			5d. PROJECT NUMBER	5e. TASK NUMBER
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>Defense Systems Management College ,9820 Belvoir Road,Fort Belvoir,VA,22060-5565</b>			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <b>Acquisition Review Quarterly, Summer 1997</b>				
14. ABSTRACT				
15. SUBJECT TERMS				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>20</b>
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>		

ties. This paper provides data to support these two findings and offers some strategies to overcome them.

## **DIVERSITY OF POLICY AND PRACTICE**

---

DAWIA expressly calls for uniformity in implementation throughout the Department of Defense.<sup>3</sup> In general, DoD Components have been consistent in their compliance with the major provisions of the law. For example, each has established an acquisition corps, identified critical acquisition positions, and enhanced professional development of its acquisition personnel through education, training, and work experience. Each has appointed a director for acquisition career management (DPCM) to manage the acquisition

workforce,<sup>4</sup> and each has established management information systems to track demographics, training, career progression, and other variables. In addition, each component has reduced turnover of incumbents in senior acquisition positions, increased representation of civilians in some senior acquisition positions, and developed procedures to provide for the selection of best qualified individuals.

In short, all have complied with the broad requirements of DAWIA. But when one looks at the specific policies and practices of each DoD Component, there is considerable variation between them. We found the Components differ in their Acquisition Corps membership criteria, mobility requirements, and centralized referral systems. The differences are described in the following paragraphs.

**Andrea Garcia** is a professor at the Defense Systems Management College. Prior to that, she spent 17 years as an Army civilian in a variety of acquisition positions. She is a graduate of DSMC's Program Management Course and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. She also holds a Master of Public Administration from George Washington University and a B.S. degree in education from the University of Maryland.

**Col. Hugo Keyner** is the Director for Defense Cooperation in Armaments, Joint U.S. Military Affairs Group[N]Korea working multi-service international cooperative research and development technology programs. He is a graduate of DSMC's APMC 90-1, the Defense Acquisition University's Senior Acquisition Course, and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. He holds an M.S. degree in national resource strategy from National Defense University.

**Thomas Robillard** is the Department of Defense National Airspace System program manager. He has been a deputy program director for Joint STARS, chief of programs, and worked as a cost analyst/chief of program control. Robillard is a graduate of DSMC's Program Management Course, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, and the Senior Executive Fellows Program at John F. Kennedy School of Government.

**Mary VanMullekom** is currently a branch head of the Working Capital Fund for the Depot Maintenance Business Area at Headquarters Marine Corps, Installations and Logistics Department, Washington, DC. She is a 1977 graduate of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces and a graduate of DSMC's PMC 88-2. She holds a M.S. degree in national resource strategy from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, a second M.S. degree in administration from Central Michigan University, and a B.A. in education from the University of Wyoming.

## **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR ACQUISITION**

### **CORPS MEMBERSHIP**

DAWIA calls for each military department to establish an Acquisition Corps and specifies eligibility criteria for membership. According to the law, Acquisition Corps membership is limited to civilians holding positions at GS-13 or above and military at the rank of major/lieutenant commander or above. In addition, membership is limited to persons having a college degree, with at least 24 semester credit hours of business management, and at least four years of acquisition work experience. Military departments are allowed to grant waivers to these provisions and to impose additional eligibility requirements.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to establishing standards and developing skills for acquisition professionals, DAWIA was intended to ensure that the best qualified people were selected for acquisition positions.<sup>7</sup> What approach does each department take to ensure the “best qualified individual” is selected for a vacant acquisition position? Each department has published literature covering the DAWIA criteria for staffing and training purposes. In the Department of the Navy (DoN), for example, all civilian Critical Acquisition Positions (CAPS) must be advertised at least within the department and must include DAWIA criteria (i.e. Acquisition Professional Community<sup>8</sup> criteria) in the rating and ranking of candidates. The rating and ranking, of course, is based (among other things) on whether an individual is certified as an acquisition professional and the level of certification he or she possesses. And, yes, all Defense Components recognize DoN certification, just as DoN rec-

ognizes certification granted by the Army, Air Force, and other DoD Components.<sup>9</sup> If that is the case, and there is full reciprocity between them, are certification requirements and criteria uniform across the DoD Components? Not exactly!

DoD Components have established generally similar requirements for Acquisition Corps membership. All comply with

**“In addition to establishing standards and developing skills for acquisition professionals, DAWIA was intended to ensure that the best qualified people were selected for acquisition positions.”**

the law and follow the education, training, and experience requirements contained in DoD Manual 5000.52M for certification at basic, intermediate, and advanced levels (Levels I, II and III). Components vary, however, in some policies regarding Acquisition Corps membership for civilian personnel.

First, the Navy more narrowly defines its Acquisition Professional Community than the other services. For example, only select portions of the Comptroller career field are APC members: business and financial managers in program management offices, cost estimators in systems commands, and cost schedule control performance evaluators.

Another difference is the requirement for incumbency in an acquisition position. As a general rule, the Army and Navy require that civilians be in designated acquisition positions when applying for membership in the Acquisition Corps. Thus, they normally do not certify an individual who is not occupying an acqui-

sition billet, regardless of his or her professional qualifications. Consequently, personnel who otherwise meet the qualifications for certification are excluded from competing for critical acquisition positions. The Air Force, on the other hand, will certify anyone who possesses the necessary education, training, and experience, regardless of his or her current position.

In sum, the Components have imposed different criteria for Acquisition Corps membership,

**"In sum, the Components have imposed different criteria for Acquisition Corps membership, and in some cases they restrict membership to those who are currently in acquisition billets."**

and in some cases they restrict membership to those who are currently in acquisition billets. Did the lawmakers intend to ensure the availability of a

ready pool containing the greatest possible number of "best qualified" potential candidates, or did they intend certification of only those civilians currently occupying acquisition billets? We believe Air Force policy is more consistent with the intent of DAWIA because it maximizes the number of truly qualified people who can be considered to fill vacant acquisition positions. The fact that someone is not currently holding an acquisition position does not diminish his or her education, skill, knowledge, or background. Moreover, military personnel are not subjected to this criteria. In all services, once an officer is certified as an acquisition professional, he or she continues to possess this military occupational specialty (MOS) whether or not the individual's current assignment is

designated as an acquisition billet. Thus all personnel, both military and civilian, should be eligible for acquisition corps membership based on qualifications, not on a job description or current assignment.

### **CIVILIAN MOBILITY**

DAWIA encourages the Components to promote mobility of civilian Acquisition Corps members. It authorizes the Secretary of Defense to require civilians to sign mobility statements, and it requires him to identify categories of civilians who, as a condition of serving in the Acquisition Corps, must sign mobility statements. This authority has been delegated to each of the Defense Components.<sup>10</sup>

Should civilians be required to be geographically mobile? This is another area where DoD Components agree to disagree. The law is vague as to what exactly is meant by "mobility," and the Components interpret it differently. There are at least three different definitions:

- Functional mobility is a new assignment within the same organization and commuting area, but to a position in another career field or functional area or specialty.
- Organizational mobility is an assignment to a different organization within the same commuting area.
- Geographic mobility is relocation outside the commuting area.

The Army imposes all three types of mobility as a condition for membership in the Acquisition Corps. Although involuntary mobility is its least preferred method for filling positions, it retains the

right to enforce it under two circumstances: to ensure that an employee receives field or headquarters experience, and to staff hard-to-fill positions with specialized skills in remote areas. The Navy requires no written mobility statement for Acquisition Corps membership. Although they feel certain types of employees, such as interns and senior managers, should probably be mobile, they believe it would be counterproductive and cost prohibitive to require all civilians to be geographically mobile. The Air Force does not specifically require a mobility agreement for Acquisition Corps membership, but different acquisition career fields (such as program management) require mobility agreements. Within their career fields, civilians indicate their geographic preferences. Defense agencies do not require geographic mobility. Personnel are only considered for employment in the geographic areas they choose.

In sum, DoD Components vary in their implementation of mobility requirements. The Army has chosen to institute the most comprehensive approach, to include mandatory geographic relocation; the Air Force leaves the matter up to each career field; and the Navy and DoD impose no mobility requirement.

Mobility agreements can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, they give Components maximum flexibility in assignment of personnel, facilitate broadening of work experience at different levels, and promote the ability of civilians to compete against their military counterparts. On the other hand, relocation costs are high, and the threat of involuntary relocation may discourage highly qualified candidates from joining the Acquisition Corps. In any case, it is debatable whether

parity between civilians and the military can ever be achieved without some normalization of mobility requirements.

### **CENTRAL REFERRAL SYSTEMS**

DAWIA requires the use of centralized job referral systems.<sup>11</sup> The intent was to open positions to all Acquisition Corps members regardless of their current location. Again, Defense Components have taken different approaches. The Army's use of centralized job referral systems was not affected by DAWIA. The Army fills its critical acquisition positions via the Army Civilian Career Evaluation System (ACCES), a centralized referral system based on 10 independent career programs, which was in place before passage of DAWIA. Acquisition personnel must register in each ACCES career field for

which they wish consideration. When vacancies arise, registrants are automatically considered for positions for which they are eligible. The Army also uses the Corps of Engineers referral system and Army-wide vacancy announcements to fill acquisition positions.

**"The Army has chosen to institute the most comprehensive approach, to include mandatory geographic relocation; the Air Force leaves the matter up to each career field; and the Navy and DoD impose no mobility requirement."**

In addition, the Army is pursuing some ambitious new initiatives. Its goal is to have a centrally managed program, with clearly established career paths that will include rotational assignments across functions and organizations. It intends to

assess the potential of acquisition workforce members in nine competencies (oral and written communications, problem solving, leadership, interpersonal skills, self-direction, flexibility, decisiveness, and technical competency) and groom them for advancement. On an annual basis, it will select the most promising GS-13s for a "competitive development group" that will be centrally managed, placed in developmental assignments for a three-year period, and given priority placement for education and training before being accessed into the Acquisition Corps.

In the future, the Army is considering expanding its centralized program manager selection board process to other key leadership positions. In addition, a pilot program is now under way to centrally administer lateral assignments for Senior Service College graduates and others within the Program Executive Officer (PEO) structure.

The Navy implemented a centralized job referral system in 1993. It consists of a voice mail system listing all civilian critical acquisition positions being filled through merit promotion. Using a Defense Switch Network (DSN), commercial, or 1-800 number, individuals can receive specific information about each vacancy and can obtain a copy of the announcement via fax.

The Air Force has 21 career fields involved in the acquisition workforce. Like

"In sum, the Components have imposed different criteria for Acquisition Corps membership, and in some cases they restrict membership to those who are currently in acquisition billets."

the Army, it uses a system that was in place before passage of DAWIA. Acquisition Corps members register for career programs for which they are eligible, and they complete a "dream sheet" to indicate their interest in geographic areas. Vacancies for acquisition positions at levels GS-13 through GS-15 are sent to the civilian personnel center, which maintains the database for the central referral system. The system generates a list of the top 30 candidates: 15 available for promotion and 15 available for lateral assignment. The selecting official makes his or her selection from that list of candidates, conducting interviews if desired. Thus Air Force Acquisition Corps members are automatically considered for positions as they become available.

The Director for Acquisition Education, Training, and Career Development has established a centralized referral system (CRS) to cover critical acquisition positions in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, and defense agencies, field activities, support activities, and schools. It covers occupational series groups across a wide variety of areas shown in the adjacent box.

The CRS basically functions as an announcement distribution system. Civilian personnel offices send vacancy announcements for critical acquisition positions to a central distribution point. From there, copies of the announcements are automatically sent to the homes of CRS registrants. Registrants receive only announcements that match the grade levels, career fields, occupational series groups, and geographic preferences for which they have registered.

To sum up, the Army and the Air Force use established centralized referral sys-

### OCCUPATIONAL SERIES IN THE CENTRALIZED REFERRAL SYSTEM

Social science and psychology  
Personnel management  
Physical sciences  
Biological sciences  
Accounting and budgeting  
Medical  
Veterinary  
Engineering  
Legal  
Information  
Business and contracting  
Copyright and Patents  
Quality assurance  
Equipment and facilities  
Mathematics  
Library  
Transportation  
Education  
Investigation  
Administrative  
Supply

### PROGRAM MANAGER SELECTION

DAWIA specified minimum experience and training requirements for personnel in program manager, deputy program manager, and PEO positions.<sup>12</sup> The law is silent, however, on what means should be used to select individuals to fill these senior acquisition positions. Military departments all use some type of selection board to fill program manager positions, and they all consider both military and civilian candidates (except for positions designated as military), but they vary somewhat in their procedures.

In the Army, program managers for Acquisition Category (ACAT) I and II programs are selected by the Best Qualified Board. This board usually meets in January of each year to review military and civilian records to identify the best qualified applicant for each program manager position. In addition, a program manager selection board convenes in March or April each year to select individuals for ACAT III program manager positions that have been designated for civilians only. Applications are made to the board, not to the position. Preferences of the applicants for geographic or organizational placement are not taken into consideration. If an applicant is selected for a position and declines to accept it, he or she is no longer eligible to be considered for another program manager position.

Navy ACAT I and II program managers and their deputies are selected by a centralized Best Qualified panel. Both military and civilian positions must be advertised, and a panel is used to rate and rank the candidates. Candidate slates are then prepared, listing the civilian and military personnel who rank highest. Call letters go out to the systems commands each

tems that are administered by functional area and automatically generate lists of potential candidates. The Navy's system provides job announcements in response to requests from applicants. DoD's system notifies applicants when a position that matches their qualifications and preferences becomes available. We advocate a uniform system that automatically identifies qualified candidates in accordance with their preferences, since this maximizes the chances of finding the best possible person for the job.

November or December, requesting applications for specific ACAT I and II program manager positions that are projected to become vacant over the next 18 months. These are distributed to GS-15s, who apply only for those positions for which they wish to be considered.

The Air Force operates in much the same way as the Army. Its selecting body is called the Material Management Board. Like the other military departments, it considers all civilian and military candidates for these positions.

In sum: All Military Departments use a central selection board process to evaluate civilian and military candidates for

**"In sum: All Military Departments use a central selection board process to evaluate civilian and military candidates for major program manager positions. Yet, they operate under different rules."**

major program manager positions. Yet, they operate under different rules. The main difference tends to be the penalty associated with declining an offer. If selected by the board,

Army civilians

must accept a program manager position or they become ineligible for future promotion in the Army Acquisition Corps. Air Force civilians are removed from the program manager referral process for a one-year period. Navy civilians are not even considered for a given program manager position unless they apply for it.

We hesitate to make any global assertions on the efficacy of the boards used by military departments to select program managers and deputy program managers. However, we find that current methods do not result in a uniform process nor in an

equitable distribution of civilians in major program manager positions, as we shall see in the next section.

## **COMPARISON OF CIVILIAN AND MILITARY OPPORTUNITIES**

---

DAWIA mandates a number of specific actions relative to the civilian workforce.<sup>13</sup> It expressly limits conditions for preferring military over civilian personnel, and it calls for "a substantial increase in the proportion of civilians (as compared to armed forces personnel) serving in critical acquisition positions in general, in program manager positions, and in division head positions over the proportion of civilians."<sup>14</sup>

One metric for DAWIA implementation is the relative increase in the number and the proportion of civilians serving in senior acquisition positions. Another benchmark is the education, training, and assignments offered to the civilian workforce compared with those available prior to DAWIA. The following demographic trend data (Table 1) suggest that civilian acquisition personnel have not achieved parity with their military counterparts.

## **CIVILIAN VERSUS MILITARY PROGRAM MANAGERS**

As indicated in the previous section, the Army, Navy, and Air Force all use some type of central board to select individuals to be program managers of Major Systems (ACAT I and II programs), with civilian and military personnel competing head to head. The selection board reviews an individual applicant's file against a prede-

<b>Position</b>	<b>Civilian</b>	<b>Military</b>
Acquisition workforce (%)	85	15
Senior acquisition positions (%) <sup>1</sup>	67	33
PEOs	8	16
ACAT I and II program managers	16	124
ACAT I and II deputy program managers	91	25
Division heads	2184	1577

<sup>1</sup>Senior acquisition positions are made up of ACAT I and II program managers, deputy program managers, PEOs, senior contracting officials and division heads.

**Table 1.**  
**Distribution of Senior Acquisition Positions, All Components, 1996**

termined set of criteria and recommends selection of the most qualified individual for the position.

Despite these apparently impartial procedures, DAWIA has not had a dramatic impact on the number of civilians serving in ACAT I or ACAT II program manager positions. There is a disproportionate allocation between military and civilian acquisition professionals in these jobs. Table 2 shows that in 1996, military personnel constituted 15 percent of the acquisition workforce, yet they held 89 percent (124 out of a total of 140) of the ACAT I and ACAT II program manager positions.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, deputy program manager positions are predominantly civilian. The same 85 percent of the acquisition workforce that held only 11 percent (16 out of 140) of the program manager jobs held a more representative, but still

under-represented, 78 percent (91 out of 116) of the deputy program manager positions. Some sources suggest that the resulting mix is the optimal blend of military leadership and civilian continuity. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the distribution of ACAT I and ACAT II program manager and deputy program manager positions is inconsistent with the demographics of the population.

Trends over the past few years are not encouraging. Table 2 shows that civilian representation is declining in both critical acquisition positions and senior acquisition positions.<sup>16</sup>

To summarize, DAWIA called for the gradual increase in the number of civilian program managers as their training and experience equipped them to effectively compete to be "best qualified." The progress to date has been disappointing.

	1994	1995	1996
Percent critical acquisition positions (civilian)	85	80	79
Percent senior acquisition positions (civilian)	71	71	67

**Table 2. Civilian Acquisition Positions, All Components**

### CIVILIAN VERSUS MILITARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Civilian participation in Senior Service School provides another benchmark of DAWIA's impact. The pinnacle of Professional Military Education (PME) is Senior Service School. As the last formal educational opportunity for most senior level officers (and civilians), it is a qualifying credential on the path to senior assignments. Thus we should expect to see an increase in civilian attendance at Senior Service Schools and all levels of PME since DAWIA was passed in 1991. There are six Senior Service Schools (Table 3).

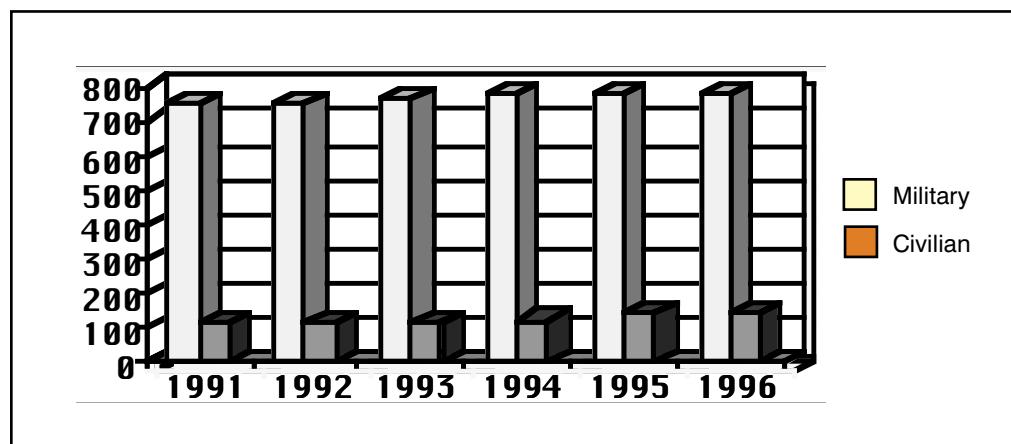
The population of civilian and military attendees at each of the Senior Service Schools from 1990 through 1996 (the DAWIA years) is described in Appendix A and portrayed in Figure 1.

As the data indicate, civilian enrollment in the Senior Service Schools remained fairly constant (ranging from 110 to 123) from 1991 through 1994. The years 1995 and 1996 saw civilian participation in the Senior Acquisition Course (SAC) raise the combined figures for all schools to 140 and 143, respectively. The Senior Acquisition Course traces its origin to DAWIA and Defense Acquisition University. It has

SCHOOL	SERVICE
Army War College	Army
Naval War College	Navy
Air War College	Air Force
Marine Corps War College	Marine Corps
National War College	Joint
Industrial College of the Armed Forces <sup>1</sup>	Joint

<sup>1</sup>Includes the Senior Acquisition Course established under DAWIA.

**Table 3. Senior Service Schools**



**Figure 1. Military and Civilian Attendees in Senior Service School**

helped, but not dramatically. A future study to evaluate the relative percentage of civilian and military Acquisition Corps members would be a useful undertaking.

The conclusion is that civilians continue to be under represented in certain categories of senior acquisition positions, such as ACAT I and II program managers. Further, they continue to be under represented across the board in all senior acquisition positions. Outside of the slight increases associated with the Senior Acquisition Course, DAWIA has had marginal effect on civilian participation in Senior Service Schools.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

What has DAWIA accomplished? It has succeeded in prompting the DoD Components to take the steps necessary to professionalize the defense acquisition workforce. In response to DAWIA, the military departments have raised standards, increased training, and enhanced

development of their acquisition personnel. As a result, we believe, both military and civilian acquisition personnel have benefited over the past five years. DAWIA implementation has brought about many sorely needed changes and has allowed DoD Components to move forward to meet the daily acquisition challenges with a more highly trained and better equipped workforce.

However, change has been rather slow. DAWIA was enacted in 1991, yet the Components did not begin to accomplish many of its provisions until much later. Some attribute the delay to “service-unique culture,” while others admit that implementation may not be as far along as they would like. In every case, however, those we interviewed felt that they are better off now than they were before DAWIA.

Each Component we interviewed was genuinely concerned about its acquisition workforce. They shared a strong commitment to furthering professional workforce development. We were especially im-

pressed by the Navy's commitment to a full-time SES-level DACM, the Air Force central referral system and staffing process, and the recent Army initiatives to enhance its civilian acquisition workforce.

No doubt DAWIA has made a difference. However, more remains to be done. Our analysis revealed at least two areas in need of improvement: There is a lack of uniformity across DoD Components; there are disparate professional development opportunities for civilian and military personnel. We will now consider the reasons for these conditions and discuss why they matter.

### **LACK OF UNIFORMITY**

Even though there is one law, implementation throughout the DoD Components is uneven. There is general compliance with DAWIA and DoD regulations, and to some extent there is uniformity across the Components. However, there are many instances where the same statutory provision was carried out differently.

**"Our analysis revealed at least two areas in need of improvement: There is a lack of uniformity across DoD Components; there are disparate professional development opportunities for civilian and military personnel."**

Since responsibility for implementation was delegated to the various Components, they established different requirements for Acquisition Corps membership, imposed different mobility rules, and used

different mechanisms to fill acquisition positions.

It is not very clear why the Components diverged in their policies and practices.

Tradition, culture, and internal politics probably drove many decisions. Does it really matter whether the Components differ from one another? Despite their differences, they are functioning relatively well and making incremental progress. Yet the law requires uniformity to the maximum extent practicable. What's more, similar policies and practices make sense in today's environment, which increasingly stresses the importance of joint operations.

We believe that the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Military Departments could do more to match the right person to the job if they used an integrated centralized referral system. The original intent of the framers of DAWIA was to promote centralized referral for civilians, not only within military departments but across them. Draft recommendations of the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Investigations, dated 8 March 1990, called for the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition to "evaluate the feasibility and desirability of establishing a DoD-wide referral system that would enhance the ability of civilian acquisition personnel to acquire 'joint experience' as do military personnel." While this provision never made it into the final version of bill, we think the idea has merit. This is particularly true in view of the current emphasis on "jointness" and the reduced opportunities for advancement associated with the drawdown in acquisition programs.

### **CIVILIAN AND MILITARY DISPARITY**

Despite small gains in the number of civilians that hold senior acquisition positions, there is still a significant disparity. The distribution of the acquisition

workforce and the relative makeup of military and civilian positions suggest a systemic bias in the process, which serves to provide better access to program manager positions for military members than for civilians.

Why is it, after five years of DAWIA-sponsored training and education, that selecting officials (and these include civilians) find civilians best qualified to be deputies and their military counterparts best qualified to be program managers? Is it bias? Is it education? Is it training? Is it culture? Is it Office of Personnel Management (OPM) constraints?

We think, in some respects, all of these elements contribute. Some officials believe that, on the strength of their training, military members make better leaders. Some believe that operational experience is a vital element in the program manager's makeup. Some argue that because civilians lack mobility, civilian program managers would limit promotion opportunities for junior members by encumbering positions indefinitely (although this is prohibited by law). Others believe that the different personnel systems make military more attractive than civilian managers. (They are easier to hire and fire!)

While it may be true that all of these issues have some bearing on selection, we are firmly convinced that selection boards continue to pick military members over civilian members for the very simple reason that they are better qualified for what are essentially leadership positions. Why do selection boards find them more qualified? The answer lies in the nature and breadth of experience that typifies the military versus civilian career. The cultural realities of the services and the per-

sonnel systems they employ are fundamental to this reality.

The military career is predicated upon a mix of assignments, training, and education. This mix features mobility, progression, challenge and leadership development. At its very core, it is a competitive "up or out" system. The fundamental competencies are broad perspective and leadership. The military path to success follows a series of relocations to jobs of increasing difficulty, complexity, and visibility. It requires extensive Professional Military Education (PME), operational experience, and advanced academic degrees—usually technical. The competitive nature of the promotion system serves to retain only the most promising members in an ever-shrinking advancement pool.

**“...we are firmly convinced that selection boards continue to pick military members over civilian members for the very simple reason that they are better qualified for what are essentially leadership positions.”**

The traditional civilian career path has been functionally based. Unlike the military path, which traverses the mountain to gain the summit, the civilian path is more of a spiral staircase. It focuses on depth and expertise in narrowly defined functional stovepipes. Promotion comes within a functional world where ever-increasing technical excellence (in accordance with OPM standards) is the basis for advancement. Lateral mobility across career fields is difficult and costly. Geographic mobility, though encouraged, is not necessarily required. Advanced tech-

nical and management degrees are required. PME is not. The fundamental value is technical competence and stability. Mobility and leadership were not critical attributes of the career civilian. This reality is grounded in OPM requirements and public law.

Qualifying experience, in a given functional area, is probably the most limiting factor in civilian career development. While OPM restrictions arguably protect and promote the best qualified for a given position, job series requirements and qualification standards combine to effectively limit civilians to a single functional career path, often in a single location. Where the military system develops mobile generalist leaders, the civilian system develops stable functional experts.

Program management is all about leadership and broad perspective. In order to compete effectively for the top jobs, civilians need to have at least the same lev-

els of education, training, and experience as those against whom they must compete.

On the basis of our study, DAWIA has yet to effect the “substantial” civilian advancement it was intended to achieve. Inequities in education, training, and experience persist, but they can be overcome as long as managers and employees alike are willing to commit to a career development program that promotes leadership (PME), broad perspective (functional mobility), and diverse work experience (organizational mobility).

Why is this important? First of all, the law requires it. Second, good business practice mandates effective and efficient use of all our human resources, enabling the best and the brightest, whether civilian or military, to rise to the most senior acquisition positions. Finally, and perhaps most important, it is the right thing to do.

## **APPENDIX A**

---

Senior Service School Attendance: 1991 Through 1996

## **ENDNOTES**

---

1. Public Law 101-510, “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991,” Title XII, *Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act*. November 5, 1990. (Sections 1701-1764 of Title 10, United States Code).
2. For purposes of this study, DoD Components are defined as the Military Departments (Army, Navy, Air Force) and Defense Agencies.
3. “Section 1701(b) UNIFORM IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary (of Defense) shall ensure that, to the *maximum extent practicable*, acquisition workforce policies and procedures established in accordance with this chapter are *uniform* in their implementation throughout the Department of Defense.”
4. The Director for Acquisition Education, Training and Career Development was established within the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology to oversee DAWIA implementation and to manage the acquisition workforce within defense agencies. The Director for Acquisition Career Management was established within each Military Department under the respective Service Acquisition Executive to manage the acquisition workforce within each Military Department.
5. For the sake of brevity, this is an oversimplification of the statutory requirements for all acquisition career fields
6. Public Law 101-510, Title 10, U.S.C., Section 1732.
7. “Section 1722(d) Best qualified.—The Secretary of Defense shall ensure that the policies established under this chapter are designed to provide for the selection of the *best qualified individual* for a position, consistent with other applicable law.”
8. “Acquisition Professional Community” is the Navy term for Acquisition Corps. The Navy decided against the term “Acquisition Corps” to avoid confusion with its other “corps.”
9. *Welcome to the Acquisition Workforce, An Introductory Guide to the Department of the Navy Acquisition Workforce Program*, p. 10.
10. “Section 1732(e) MOBILITY STATEMENTS.—(1) The Secretary of Defense is authorized to require civilians in an Acquisition Corps to sign mobility statements. (2) The Secretary of Defense shall identify which categories of civilians in an Acquisition Corps, as a condition of serving in the corps, shall be required to sign mobility statements.”

11. “Section 1734 Part (f)—The Secretary of Defense shall prescribe regulations providing for the use of centralized lists to ensure that persons are selected for critical positions without regard to geographic location of applicants for such positions.”
12. Public Law 101-510, Title 10, U.S.C., Section 1735(b) and (c).
13. “Section 1722(c) OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVILIANS TO QUALITY. The Secretary of Defense shall ensure that civilian personnel are provided the opportunity to acquire the education, training and experience necessary to qualify for senior acquisition positions.”

“Section 1722(b). LIMITATION ON PREFERENCE FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL—(1) The Secretary of Defense shall ensure that no requirement or preference for a member of the armed forces is used in the consideration of persons for acquisition positions, except (when required by law, when essential for performance of the duties of the position, or for another compelling reason).”
14. “Section 1722(e) MANAGEMENT OF WORKFORCE. The Secretary of Defense shall ensure that the acquisition workforce is managed such that...there is a substantial increase in the proportion of civilians (as compared to armed forces personnel) serving in critical acquisition positions in general, in program manager positions, and in division head positions over the proportion of civilians (as compared to armed forces personnel) in such positions on October 1, 1990.”
15. Director, Acquisition Education, Training and Career Development memorandum, subject: Secretary of Defense’s FY 1996 (1997) Annual Report to the Congress, 5 February 1997.
17. Ibid.

## REFERENCES

---

Air Force AFPEO/CM. (1994, July). *Acquisition professional development program guide*. Washington, DC: Author.

Army Acquisition Career Management Office & U.S. Army Total Personnel Command. (1996, October). *Army Acquisition Corps civilian playbook*. Washington, DC: Author.

Army Acquisition Career Management Office. (1996, November). *Army acquisition workforce civilian training opportunities*. Washington, DC: Author.

Charles, K. (1996, November 13). *A new direction for the Army Acquisition Corps*. [Briefing].

Department of the Navy, Director, Acquisition Career Management. (Undated). *Welcome to the acquisition workforce: An introductory guide*. Washington, DC: Author.

Deputy Director of Acquisition Career Management, Office of the Secretary of Defense. (1993). *The acquisition career management program* (Pamphlet ADS-93-1-BR). Washington, DC: OSD.

Deputy Director of Acquisition Career Management, Office of the Secretary of Defense. (1996). *Central referral system* (Pamphlet ADS-96-01-BR). Washington, DC: OSD.

Deputy Director of Acquisition Career Management, Office of the Secretary of Defense. (1997). *The acquisition workforce certification program* (Pamphlet ADS-97-01-BR). Washington, DC: OSD.

National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991, P. L. 101-510. Title XII, Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act, Sections 1701-1764 of Title 10, U.S. Code (November 5, 1990).

U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee. (March 1990). Draft Acquisition Workforce Recommendations.

Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition). (1993, January). DoD 5000.58-R. Acquisition career management program (ACMP). Washington, DC: USD(A).

Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition). (1992, January). DoDI 5000.58. Defense acquisition workforce. Washington, DC: USD(A).

Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition). (1995, November). DoD 5000.52-M. Acquisition career development program.

Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition). (1991, October). DoD Directive 5000.52. Defense acquisition education, training, and career development program.

Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition) and Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force, Manpower, and Personnel). (1991, November). DoDI 5000.55. Reporting management information on DoD military and civilian acquisition personnel and positions.

U.S. General Accounting Office. (1992, January). Implementation of the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act.

**Internet sites:**

<http://www.sarda.army.mil/dacm/>

*and*

[http://www.safaq.mil/acq\\_workf/](http://www.safaq.mil/acq_workf/)

